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Statement on East Timor

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before United Nations Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

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Honarable chairman, distinguished delegates,

On behalf of Free East Timor Japan Coalition, I express my deepest gratitude for giving me this opportunity to make a statement on East Timor before the Committee. Free East Timor Japan Coalition is composed of eight solidarity groups based in Sapporo, Sendai, Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, Okayama, Kure, Zentsuji and Catholic Council for Justice and Peace. Last year we invited two East Timorese from Darwin and Lisbon, organising more than 30 public meetings all over Japan from Hokkaido to Okinawa. Each group is independent in its activities but shares the principle to support the right to self-determination of the people of East Timor and also shares the understanding that it is the military occupation by Indonesia that interrupts the process of decolonisation of East Timor and causes all kinds of human right violations.

Today I came here to request the Committee to secure the reproductive rights of East Timorese Women as one of the most important elements of self-determination. The reproductive rights literally mean the right to having babies but includes the right to health of both mother and children, improvement of their living condition and voluntary prticipation to the development of their community. This is what has been suffered most in East Timor since the invasion of Indonesian army.

I will not repeat what happened in the past. I will pick up some recent cases and introduce them to the Committee.

What is the health condition of the people? According to our sources in East Timor about 20% of children are infected with tuberculosis. This number came from the area in which the condition of nutrition is not worst. So they say it can be assumed more than 30% of children is infected by teberculosis in general. One of the main causes of infection of tuberculosis is malnutrition. Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics says the rate of children whose malnutrition is the most serious is the highest in East Timor. in 1987. Mr. Mario Viegas Carrascalao, Governor of East Timor told a House of Representatives delegation that visited East Timor last month 70% of the population are infected with tuberculosis.

What is the condition of agriculture? Our sources say cultivation of food crops is often interrupted by the restriction of movement imposed by Indonesian Army when they start the military operation. In one district because of the delay of planting and long rain afterwards the yield was just a third or half comparing to the previous year.

How about the hospitals? The Governor said out of 61 districts in East Timor, only 40 have physicians. There are only 25 trained midwives and the number of paramedics is also small. Treatment at hospital is rarely available for the people. It costs them too much and medicines often disappear, being sold in markets before reaching local hospitals. Sometimes a doctor gives his patient only a half of dosage. It is quite usual that the doctor is not willing to see the poor people. Women are very much afraid because there are some mistreatment frequently happened when they give birth at the hospital. I was told one case by a refugee woman. Some people witnessed at the time of childbirth an Indonesian midwife sat down on the stomach of the pregnant, tried to squeeze out the baby with pushing her stomach. After her giving birth both mother and child died. One Japanese source said his father observed that method when he was staying at one Javanese village in 1960s. We are wondering if that midwife worked with that old method that has ceased these days. In East Timor people say "We go to a hospital to die." They cannot trust and depend on a hospital.

In spite of the urgent needs for the improvement of nutrition and medical care, it is the birth control programme that Indonesian Government has been eager to promote in East Timor. What is worse, in that programme a controversial injectable contraceptive has been intensively used. According to BKKBN : the Family Planning Coordinating Board, in 1987 59.7% of current participants in birth control programme used this contraceptive injection, while in Indonesia in average 19% of the participants took that method. The injection whose ingredient is a progesterone hormone is well known for its side effects, such as a thrombus(blood clots),hepatitis, abnormal menstruation and possible effect to cause cancer. According to the research carried out by JAICA : Japan International Cooperation Association in North Sumatra in 1988, about half of the user of injectable contraceptive claimed the side effects listed above. In Japan a progesterone hormone was not approved as a contraceptive by Ministry of Health. It was approved as a remedy of breast cancer and uterus cancer in 1987 but it is revealed recently 11 people died from thrombus and 12 people cannot recover from thrombus or are suffering from its sequela. Our Ministry of Health has organised one special committee to detect its causality. I must point out another effect of progesterone hormone. It hinders the secretion of breast milk. This is the common effect that we have when we are given synthetic hormones. The same thing happens when we take pills. Usually a doctor give the direction not to take progesterone hormone at least 6 months after giving birth. If this direction is not properly passed, mothers would get into the trouble especially when they cannot provide any nutrition to their babies except their breast milk.

Timorese women claim that Indonesian medical personnels do not provide them necessary information about these contraceptives. They also say it is very difficult to refuse to take part in the programme because village leaders are urged to cooperate, In some cases they are imposed a norm, local clinic for birth control is under the supervision of military post.

While the condition of East Timorese is deteriotating, our sources say more than 1000 Indonesian are landing East Timor every month. They say it is easy to distiguish an Indonesian from a Timorese, since it is only the Indonesian who is fat in East Timor.

I will conclude that the reproductive right of East Timorese people has been denied since the invasion of Indonesia into East Timor. In this sence I cannot agree with the decision made by the United Nations to present the UN Population Award to President Suharto of Indonesia. This is a kind of contradiction to the discussion continued on the issue in the UN.

International society, especially the United Nations has continued to asked herself "What is development?" and found that development is not something that can be given , but what is to be created by the members of community. The people in East Timor cannot take that step because of the constant fear to the violences of Indonesian authorities. Indonesian people also cannot take that step, because there is a constant antipathy of Timorese people toward what Indonesian authorities, Indonesian army have been doing in East Timor. International community cannot take that step because we are not allowed to be based in East Timor.

Honarable chairman, distinguished delegates,

Negotiation for peace should be held including the very persons concerned with this cause, the East Timorese, as soon as possible. We would like to step in the new stage and create true development together with the people of East Timor and the people of Indonesia.